

**Society of  
St. Vincent de Paul**  
Toronto Central Council

**Serving Those in Need in the Greater Toronto Area**



**Turning Concern  
Into Action**

**Information Kit**

# **Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

## **Fact sheet**

- Founded by Frederic Ozanam in Paris, France, in 1833 when he and a few fellow students decided to put their faith into action.
- First conference (group of volunteers, generally based in a Catholic parish) was established in Canada, in Quebec, in 1846. The first conference in Ontario was established at St. Michael's Cathedral, Toronto, in 1850.
- The motto of the Society is "to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice and joy".
- Although we are a faith based organization, we serve anyone who requests our assistance
- Toronto Central Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul works with 115 conferences in the Greater Toronto Area. These conferences have over 1200 volunteer members ("Vincentians").
- Many of our Vincentians come from countries where they experienced poverty first hand and now are committed to "giving back".
- The Vincentians in the GTA make 15,000 visits each year, serving 65, 000 people.
- Our service to the poor (including those marginalized by society for a variety of reasons) takes the form of person-to-person contact, generally through home visits by a pair of Vincentians.
- When Vincentians visit a home on request, they bring material assistance (in the form of food or clothing vouchers, or making arrangements for free basic furniture) as well love, respect, compassion and hope.
- Many of those we serve are lone-support moms but many are refugees, two-parent families and disabled adults. Many of these are working poor.
- Some seek our assistance once or twice, to get through an unexpected circumstance, while many others require our support and assistance on a longer-term basis.
- Toronto Central Council also operates a number of "Special Works", including 4 women's shelters, 13 homes for recovering alcoholics/addicts, residences for adults with developmental disabilities and mental illness, as well as a free summer camp for disadvantaged girls, ages 5-13.
- An Affiliated Work of the Society is VincentPaul Family Homes Corporation (Gower Park Place), which has 164 rent-geared-to-income units in East York.
- 97 cents of every dollar donated to the Society in the GTA goes to serving those in need.
- Internationally, over 600,000 Vincentians in 47,000 conferences in 132 countries on all five continents serve those in need.
- The International Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.
- In Ontario, the Society has 4618 members and last year made 73,514 visits to those in need, helping 161,469 people.
- Provincial Special Works include 46 stores, 2 affordable housing buildings, 14 transitional houses, 21 supportive homes, 2 summer camps, and 8 prison ministries.

# Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Toronto Central Council

## What We Do

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### ◆ At the Parish Level

Home visitations are conducted by over 1,200 volunteer members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, assisting 16,000 families and individuals each year with emergency food, clothing and beds. Parish-based conferences of volunteer members - or "Vincentians" - also conduct annual Christmas programs and assist in financing the Special Works of the Society.

### ◆ Marygrove Camp

A fully subsidized residential camping program for 1,200 girls, aged 5-13, located on Georgian Bay near Penetang.

### ◆ Stores & Distribution Centre

Items are provided free of charge to those in need through a voucher system in our stores and through a partnership with Goodwill. Goods are also available to walk-in customers at low cost.

Donations are collected through the parish "Bundle Weekend" program.

### ◆ Prison Apostolate & Court Services

Provides support and clothing for persons in prison or awaiting trial, and assists them in maintaining contact with their families.

### ◆ Twinning

A partnership offering aid to needy Conferences and Councils in Canada and overseas.

### ◆ Gower Park Place

Operated by the VincentPaul Family Homes Corporation, Gower Park Place is a non-profit 164 unit affordable apartment building in East York, working with families to move them off social assistance.

### ◆ Residential Housing Programs

#### • Women's Emergency and Transitional Housing Programs

Providing housing and support to women in crisis through a network of emergency beds and longer-term housing at Mary's Home, Amelie House, St. Clare's Residence and Elisa House. 128 women receive secure housing and support each night with on going assistance provided to women fleeing domestic abuse.

#### • St. Francis Residence

A home for 24 men and women who have experienced mental illness and are dependant on others for support. Our aim is to help increase the quality of their lives and hasten a return to self-sufficiency.

#### • Ozanam House

Provides transitional accommodation and support for men recently discharged from a detoxification unit and waiting entry into an addiction treatment program. This home provides a caring and supportive residence for 12 men.

#### • VincenPaul Community Homes

Providing men and women recovering from addiction with the support and encouragement needed to build a new life. There are 13 homes, including one for persons undergoing Methadone treatment. These homes provide supportive housing for 81 men and women.

#### • DePaul House, Martineau House & Vincent House

Offers residential care and support to 18 men and women who are developmentally disabled. The residents live in a loving community, learn basic life skills, and share in decision making processes.

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For more information please visit our website at [www.svdptoronto.org](http://www.svdptoronto.org)

**Society of St. Vincent de Paul  
Toronto Central Council**

**WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO**

As members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (“Vincentians), we reach out to our neighbours in need through direct, person-to-person contact, because of:

1. Our faith;
2. The need

**Faith:**

1. Our faith and commitment to the Gospel message calls us to bring compassion and love to those in need, to “feed the hungry...” Matthew 25 (*And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."*)
2. Vincentians commit in a special way (our Vincentian vocation) to live the message of the Gospel in serving the needs of the poor and the marginalized, through home visits, our emergency shelters, homes for the disabled, those in transition to more independent living, and others in need of support.

**Need:**

- \* Despite recent improvements in the minimum wage and some increased payments to those in low income situations, statistics and experience tell us that their future is bleak without our help and without a significant plan to reduce poverty among children and adults, particularly the most vulnerable in our society.
- \* Social Assistance (Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program) has declined by more than 35 per cent over the past 11 years, if one factors in inflation (which we all do when looking for our salary increases).
- \* Minimum wage or social assistance does not allow people to adequately meet their most basic need for adequate shelter, regular nutritious meals, health care, and suitable clothing for our weather conditions. They must constantly make choices between putting food on the table and paying the rent, or, between filling prescriptions for serious health issues, or buying other necessities.
- \* Low-income families in Toronto: 1990 - 1 in 6 2005 - 1 in 4 (up by 50%)
- \* Lone-parent low-income families in Toronto: 1990 - 33% 2005 – 50% (up by 17%)
- \* In the Toronto region, applications for evictions due to non-payment of rent rose 26% between 1999 and 2006.
- \* Parents often work two jobs at minimum wage and still cannot provide for their family due to the rising cost of rent, food, fuel, transportation, and clothing. Children cannot learn when they lack adequate food and suffer anxiety about their future. Their parent’s lack of hope is the inheritance and despair of a child in poverty.

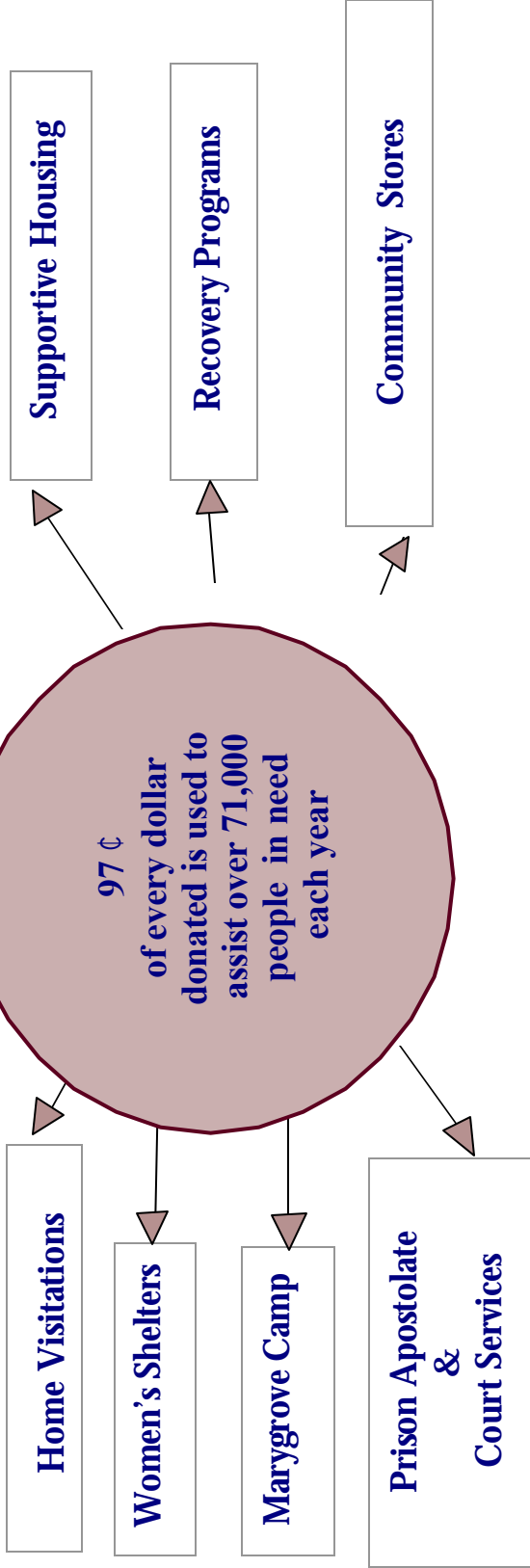
**You are their hope**

We act on behalf of the parish community. We are supported always through the prayers of our many friends, our benefactors, and our members. The weekly donations through the poor box in our parish churches, the special collection for Marygrove Camp, bequests and memorials, all make possible the continued support of those in need of our assistance, compassion and encouragement.

Please seriously consider joining your parish Conference. To join or for more information about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and our service to those in need, please speak to a member, call our Central office: **416-364-5577** or visit our website, **[www.svdptoronto.org](http://www.svdptoronto.org)**.

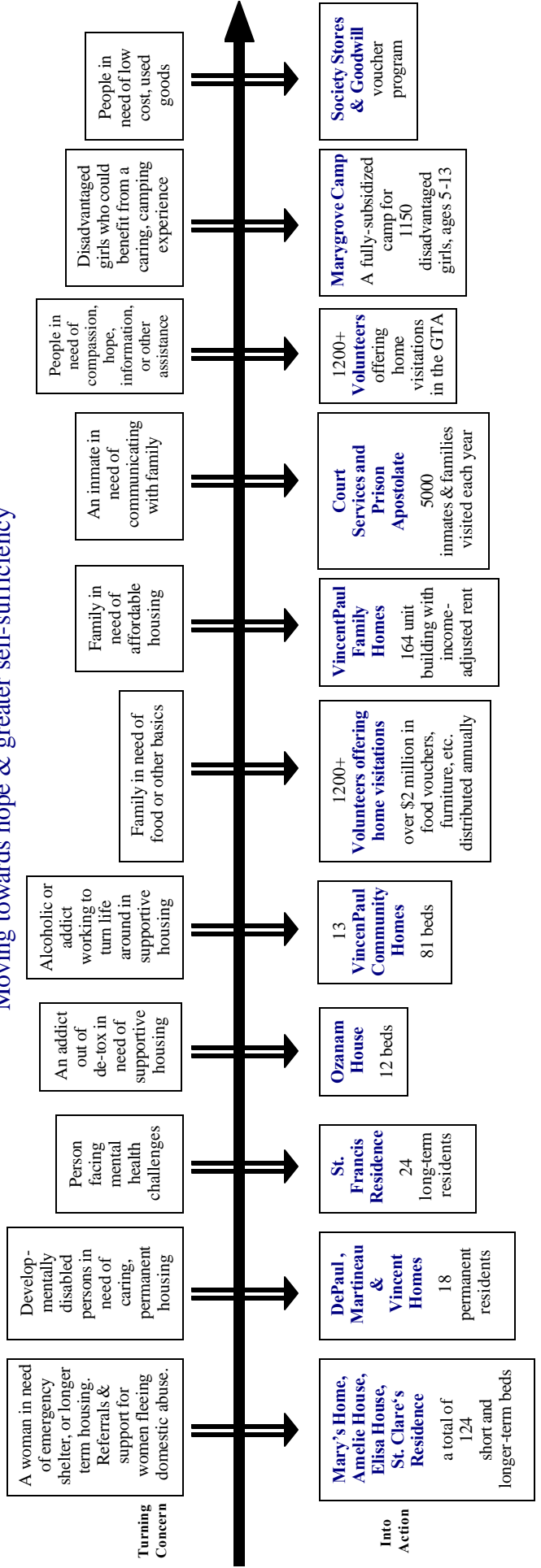
# Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Toronto Central Council



## Turning Concern into Action

Moving towards hope & greater self-sufficiency



# **Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

## **A Brief History**

### **Founding of the Society**

In 1833, Frederic Ozanam, and a group of students from the Sorbonne University in Paris, France, were challenged to prove their faith in Christ through action, not just words. The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was formed when they took up this challenge and began to work with the desperately poor in Paris. Developing a simple system, they went in teams to help the poor in their homes, in the streets, in the hospitals and the asylums.

By 1834, there were more than 100 members and the Conference was renamed the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, in honour of a 16th century French cleric renowned for his work with the poor. Today, over 600,000 Vincentians in 47,000 conferences in 132 countries on all five continents serve those in need. The International Society of St. Vincent de Paul has been nominated for the 2008 Nobel Peace Prize.

### **The Society in Canada**

The conviction and enthusiasm of the founders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul convinced many Catholic students to join the nascent Society. One of them was a young Canadian, Joseph Painchaud Jr. (1819-1855) who was studying medicine in Paris. On returning home, Dr. Painchaud introduced the Society into Canada by establishing the Conférence Notre-Dame at Quebec's Cathedral (now a Basilica) Parish on November 12, 1846. During its first year of existence, the Conference members distributed \$5,000.00 to the poor, mostly to aid victims of two major fires that destroyed two thirds of the city in that year. The Superior Council, which is now called the National Council, was created in 1850.

Blessed Bishop Ignace Bourget, then Archbishop of Montreal, first established a Conference in Montreal in 1848 in St. Jacques Parish. One of its members, Dr. George Muir, moved to Toronto where he became the instigator of the first Conference at St Michael's Cathedral Parish (the Conference of Charity of Our Lady of Toronto) in 1850.

### **The Society in Greater Toronto**

In its early days, the Society in Toronto mainly served the growing numbers of immigrants that populated the slums of the inner city. St. Basil's Conference, in the Bay and Bloor area, was established in 1859. The conference's 1889 Annual Report states that it expended \$321.00 in providing 1,364 pounds of bread, five and a half cords of wood, and four and a half tons of coal for fuel, rent assistance, and various other foods provisions and medicines.

The St. Vincent de Paul Children's Aid Society was organized in 1894 under Archbishop Walsh's patronage. Initially this new Society was run completely by the members of the St

Vincent de Paul Society before it became an independent agency known as The Catholic Children's Aid Society.

This was only the first of many "Special Works" of the Society that now include women's shelters, addiction recovery homes, residences for adults with developmental disabilities and mental illness, court services, as well as a free summer camp for disadvantaged girls.

The Toronto conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul boasted of its diversity in its 1878 Annual Report. Commenting as to how it was representative of the cosmopolitan nature of the city, the report notes that past presidents included "an Englishman, a Canadian, an Irishman and a Scotchman". Today over 1200 volunteers who hail from every corner of the globe represent the Society throughout the GTA. Many of them are continuing the Vincentian tradition they experienced in their homelands.

In 2007, our volunteers made over 15,000 visits to 65,000 individuals throughout the GTA. Like their predecessors, they bring material assistance. Today, instead of coal and loaves of bread, it is generally in the form of food and clothing vouchers as well as new beds, dressers and kitchen sets delivered through our Stores division. More importantly, our volunteers provide hope, treating our neighbours in need with dignity and respect through person-to-person contact.

## Home Visitation

From the very beginning and throughout the Society's 175 years of existence around the world, home visitations have been at the core and heart of the work of Vincentians (lay members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul). Although Ozanam, our founder, was open to all forms of charities and the Society has responded to new and changing needs by establishing Special Works, home visitations continue to be the way that most Vincentians choose to make person-to-person contact with those in need.

Home visitations have the following characteristics:

They are made by a pair of Vincentians to the home of a person seeking assistance from the Society;

Generally, the call for assistance will be directed to the Society's phone number or to the parish office of the Catholic church in your area. These numbers can be obtained through our Church Directory, Central Office, or the Links ([www.svdptoronto.org](http://www.svdptoronto.org)).

Although the Society is a Catholic organization, we visit and serve anyone requesting assistance, regardless of religious beliefs or affiliations;

People may call the Society for various types of assistance. Some may need a compassionate ear. Some may need some emergency assistance in the form of food vouchers, clothing, or furniture. Others may need some information that will help them access appropriate services. Many of those we visit require short term assistance through a rough period. Others require longer-term assistance since their monthly income from all sources is not sufficient to cover their monthly expenses.

# **Society of St. Vincent de Paul**

**Toronto Central Council**



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